

Facing old and new risks in arid environments: The case of pastoral communities in Northern Kenya

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Pastoralism is an important form of livelihood in Kenya, particularly in northern Kenya. While pastoralists have always faced risks such as political marginalization, harsh climate conditions and violent conflict, pastoral communities are increasingly exposed to new risks such as wildlife conservancies as well as large-scale wind and oil projects. The growing climate security literature has provided some insights into how changing rainfall patterns are affecting pastoralist conflicts, but we know little about the compound nature of multiple risks. This paper seeks to narrow this knowledge gap. It aims to better understand new and old risks and their combined impact on pastoral communities in the counties of Turkana, Samburu and Marsabit. The study is based on a comprehensive and structured review of the scientific literature. The findings show that all pastoral communities in northern Kenya face the old risks while the newer ones are county-specific. In Turkana, potential oil spills threaten land and water resources upon which pastoralist communities depend. In Samburu, wildlife conservancies have changed the land-use system, and in Marsabit a pastoral community is exposed to noise and visible emissions from a wind park. Common to these risks are that they: (1) are caused by top-down governance processes with little to no community involvement; (2) reduce the mobility and access to water and pasture of (some) pastoral communities; (3) change the security situation. A rethinking of wildlife conservancies and energy projects is needed that involves pastoral communities from the outset and makes them the primary beneficiaries of any measure implemented in northern Kenya.

Key words: Pastoralism, risk, arid environment, northern Kenya, marginalization, climate change, conflict, energy, oil, wind, conservation